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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002430

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: A STRUGGLE FOR THE MIND OF MUQTADA AL-SADR

REF: A. BAGHDAD 317

[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 435

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission David M. Satterfield
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (S) SUMMARY: Sadrists advisors Hamid al-Sharifi and Saayid Imad Kelanter told PolOff June 7 that there is an ideological struggle between two distinctly different Sadrists camps over the conduct of relations with the Iraqi Transitional Government (ITG) and the Coalition. Both men asserted that Political Advisor Shaykh Ali Semaysim is looking to regain his prominence over the political strategy for the Sadrists movement and may be willing to reengage with the ITG and the U.S. The key issue remains Sadr militia detainees held by the Coalition. They urged the U.S. to put their trust in Shaykh Ali Semaysim and that the relatively low level intermediaries that the ITG and Coalition are now dealing with on this issue are followers of Sadrists rival Qais Khazali, an outspoken anti-Coalition advisor to al-Sadr. END SUMMARY.

A TALE OF BETRAYAL AND MISTRUST

[1](#)2. (S) In a June 7 meeting at independent politico Saad Jabor's residence, Sadrists advisors Hamid al-Sharifi and Saayid Imad Kelanter told PolOff that Shaykh Ali Semaysim felt betrayed by broken promises made by Qassim Daoud and the Allawi government over the issue of detainees. Kelanter emphasized that Shaykh Semaysim took many risks in meeting Daoud as well as the Charge in January as reported in the refuels. The lack of any progress on the detainee issue, according to Kelanter, greatly undermined Semaysim's influence over Muqtada al-Sadr's camp and made future meetings with the Coalition and the ITG impossible. He claimed that their experience with allegedly corrupt and ineffective IIG officials had deepened al-Sadr's suspicions.

[1](#)3. (S) Kelanter alleged that Qais Khazali now has a huge influence over al-Sadr. He said that money, weapons and trained men from Iran provide Khazali with influence over al-Sadr. Kelanter said he is aware of the ongoing discussions by U.S. and ITG representatives with lower level Sadrists over the detainee issue and argued that these individuals (without naming anyone in particular) answer to Khazali. PolOff said political discussions should be led by the ITG with the Coalition providing information as needed. Both men claimed that Semaysim is willing to reengage and they hope to arrange a meeting in the near future.

[1](#)4. (S) Kelanter said that progress on the detainee issue with "tangible" benefits facilitated by Semaysim would improve his standing with al-Sadr and allow him to move his more moderate political agenda. (NOTE: Sadrists Shaykh Moussa al-Saadi told PolOff on the same day that they have tentatively agreed to meet representatives from the Prime Minister's office to further discuss the issue of detainees on June 12. END NOTE). He said that Semaysim hopes to complete the process of pulling the Sadrists movement into the political process by forming a separate, official political movement with its own separate list of candidates for the next elections. Kelanter asserted that they already have a list of potential names that they hope to present to Prime Minister Jafari in the hopes of gaining "legitimacy" in the eyes of the political establishment. He asked for a U.S. opinion of a Sadrists political party. PolOff responded by saying that the U.S. always encourages wider political engagement by those who have foresworn violence and reiterated that we do not choose sides among competing political forces.

[1](#)5. (S) Al-Sharifi asked PolOff for material support to help improve Semaysim's position. He said that cell phones, an armored vehicle and travel outside of Iraq would greatly improve Semaysim's stature and expand his outlook by seeing the outside world. PolOff said neither Semaysim, nor any other Iraqi politician should make his way by depending on such support, but noted our willingness to engage.

MUC-BADR CORPS NEGOTIATIONS

¶6. (S) On the issue of ongoing Sadrism-facilitated negotiations between the Muslim Ulema Council (MUC) and the Badr Corps over accusations of Badr collusion in the deaths of Sunni clerics, al-Sharifi predicted the Badr Corps would never accommodate the MUC. Al-Sharifi said that any negotiated agreement between both sides would look like a victory for al-Sadr, which is precisely what the Badr Corps and the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) do not want. He said Badr and SCIRI see the Sadrism camp as their main challenger for influence.

¶7. (S) COMMENT: Al-Sharifi and Kelanter's assertions had the feel of desperation and tend to substantiate rumors of Semaysim's reduced influence within the Sadr movement. The detainee issue, while materially important to the rank and file Sadrists and the militia, is evidently being played as an internal issue within the Sadrism camp to demonstrate authority and influence. END COMMENT.

¶8. (U) REO HILLA, REO BASRA, REO MOSUL, and REO KIRKUK minimize considered.
Jeffrey